

SIKHISM
AND
THE NIRANKARI MOVEMENT

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Sikhism and The Nirankari Movement

I

Sikhism as preached by Guru Nanak and his successors aimed at giving to the people a simple natural religion and at freeing them from meaningless and wasteful rites and rituals created by the priestly classes to exploit the masses for their own selfish gains. The multiplicity of gods and goddesses and the worship of idols and images had divided them into innumerable schismatic factions with the result that they could never dream of coming together for a common cause. The division of the people of the country into castes and classes had already done incalculable harm to the land of Bharat. With the Brahmans exploiting them and the ruling Kshatriyas maltreating them, they had forfeited the sympathies of the Vaishyas and the Sudras who formed the bulk of the population. The depressed Sudras, in majority of cases, were looked down upon as sub-human beings and treated as untouchables and unapproachables. All this was responsible for the disunity and weakness of the country and stood in the way of the creation of the idea of oneness among her people. The adventurous tribes on the north-west of the country knew of this inherent weakness of the Brahman-ridden people of India. They, therefore, feared no opposition from the general populace. They also knew that the entire wealth of the country was concentrated either in the Brahmanical sancturies or with the few ruling families who held the political power in their hands. Therefore, they became the particular targets of the attacks of the invaders and their accompanying hordes. The main bulk of the population, which counted for nothing in wealth and power, remained unaffected and disinterested. Reduced to non-entities by the upper classes they only watched them being robbed of their pelf and power, bloated with which they had been looking down upon the rest of their fellow beings. The invaders as such had always an easy walk over millions of Indians who seldom stood up unitedly to oppose them. In fact the sense of the oneness of the country and its people had not been allowed to grow by the diversity of gods and goddesses and division in castes and classes with varying and, not unoften,

opposite interests. With the coming in of the Muslims, disunity and strife was further aggravated. While the Brahmans dubbed the Muslims as *Malechha*, the Muslim *Mullas* termed the Hindus as *Kafirs*. Thus mutual hatred among the Indian people and among the rulers and ruled deepened and broadened to an unbridgeable extent with unhappy impact on the history of the country. Of this Guru Nanak was an eye-witness during the late Lodhi and early Mughal periods. He had been in close touch with some of the officials of the government of his days and had first-hand knowledge of how people groaned under their oppressive heel. He had also seen how, during the third invasion of Babar, the town of Eminabad was subjected to an indiscriminate massacre in 1521 when its people, in the words of Farishta, "were, in the end, all put to the sword, their wealth given up to depredation and their children and wives carried away" as slaves, numbering thirty thousand. (Dow, *Hist. of Hindostan*, ii, 14.) The Guru was greatly moved to see the pitiable condition of his countrymen, particularly of the womenfolk, at the hands of the Mughal invaders and shed tears of blood on their helplessness. All this was due, he felt, to disunity born of diversity of views in their religio-social lives. Men who followed different and opposite paths, with hatred for one another, could not come together even for defence against a common enemy. The first thing, therefore, he thought, was to inculcate in them their oneness, the oneness of humanity through the oneness of the fatherhood of God, the Creator of mankind, to whom all his children are equal and who has no enmity towards any one. And this is the keynote of the teachings of Guru Nanak with which the Sikh scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, begins. As for religion, "There is but one religion, the religion of Truth, if one were to follow it with firm determination," said he. And the true followers of a religion as this, with a firm belief in the Unity of God, the Creator, and in the Brotherhood of His children, cannot in honesty believe in different kinds of gods and goddesses or in castes and classes which divide them into opposite groups and warring factions, leading to a deplorable state into which India had then been landed. To save people from such an ungodly path of misery and pain, Guru Nanak devoted all his energies to expose the hollowness of idol worship and the Brahmin-made caste system which had eaten into the vitals of the Indian society. He not only preached this to all his followers and visitors and composed hymns to be sung in his congregations, but he also established, wherever he went, *Sangats* or mixed congregations where people came and sat together irrespective of their castes and creeds. These *Sangats* soon developed into Sikh missionary

centres, known as *Dharmshalas*. To these came to be added free Community kitchens, *Guru ka Langar*, where all sat together in lines, or *Pangats*, without distinction and partook of the food served therein, unmindful of who cooked and served it. These two institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat* removed, for all practical purposes, the distinctions of castes and classes, of high and low and of touchables and untouchables, from among the followers of the Guru and knit them all into the brotherhood of Sikhs, free from the shackles of the Brahmins.

While the second Guru Angad taught the Sikhs lessons in unquestioning obedience to the word of Guru Nanak and strengthened the institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat*, the third Guru Amardas went a step further and made it mandatory for all visitors to partake of the food served in the *Guru ka Langar* before they had an interview with him. There was no exception to it. Even the greatest of the great in the country, such as Emperor Akbar, and the high caste Rajput Raja of Haripur of the Shivalak Hills had to observe it.

The fourth Guru Ramdas gave to the Sikhs a religious centre, a Benaras, a Mecca, of their own in the city of Amritsar, and the fifth Guru Arjun gave to them their holy book, the *Granth Sahib*, wherein he collected not only the writings of Guru Nanak and his successors, including himself, but also a number of Hindu, Muslim and the so-called untouchable saints of India, such as Sadhna, a Muslim butcher, Kabir, a weaver, and Ravidas, an untouchable cobbler. The scripture of the Sikhs, as such, may rightly be called the bible of the people. The most remarkable thing about it is that, unlike the Hindu scriptures, it is written in the spoken language of the people to whom the Gurus delivered their message of devotion to God and service of humanity. With this, the independence of the Sikh religion was firmly established. They had no longer to look to Brahmin priests for their social ceremonies on the occasion of births, marriages, deaths, etc.

In fact, in Sikhism caste had come to be completely obliterated. The Brahmins were no longer looked upon as superior to the Khatri or Jats, nor were the Jats looked down upon as inferior to the Khatri or Brahmins. Once a person came into the fold of Sikh brotherhood, he was one with the others. Writing about them in the middle of the seventeenth century with first-hand personal knowledge, the author of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* tells us :

There is no restriction among them that a Brahmin may not become the disciple of a Khatri, for Nanak was a Khatri and no Guru among them was from the Brahmins... Similarly they placed

Khatris under the authority of the Jats who belong to the low caste of the *Vaishya*, as the big *masands* of the Guru are mostly Jats. The Brahmins and Khatris become the pupils and disciples of the Guru through the medium of *masands* and are accepted into the pupilage and discipleship of the Guru (p. 233).

The simplicity and cosmopolitan nature of Sikhism not only attracted to it a large number of Hindus but also of Muslims. This could not be tolerated by the Muslim Naqshbandi revivalists of Sirhind whose leader Shaikh Ahmad, popularly known as *Mujaddid-i-Alf-sani*, had been hoping to expand his own missionary activities in this part of the country. Opposed to Emperor Akbar's policy of religious tolerance, the Naqshbandi zealots had won over his power-hungry son Jahangir with promises of Muslim support on the understanding that, on being raised to the throne, he would act as the Royal Defender of the Muslim faith. This was responsible for the martyrdom of Guru Arjun during the first year of his reign. Jahangir himself writes in his *Tuzak* that: "a Hindu named Arjun in the garb of *Pir* and *Saikh* had by his ways and means captivated the hearts of many simple-minded Hindus, nay even of foolish and stupid Muslims, and he had noised himself about as a religious and worldly leader. They called him *Guru* and from all directions fools and fool-worshippers were attracted towards him and expressed full faith in him. For three and four generations they had kept this shop warm. For a long time the thought had been presenting itself to me that I should either put an end to this false traffic or he should be brought into the fold of Islam." During Prince Khusro's flight to the Panjab, the Guru was alleged to have sympathised with him. Without making any enquiry about the correctness of the allegation, Jahangir ordered that "having confiscated his property he should be put to death with tortures." [Also see *Muktubat-i-Imam Rabbani*, vol. I, part ii, letter No. 193.] Thus did Guru Arjun lay down his life at the altar of his new faith.

This was the first step taken by the Mughal rulers of the country to suppress the Sikh religious movement. Jahangir also ordered the imprisonment of Sixth Guru Hargobind who was incarcerated in the fort of Gwalior and was later released on the recommendation of Saint Mian Mir of Lahore. Guru Har Rai was summoned to Delhi by Emperor Aurangzeb but he was outwitted by the Guru's son Ram Rai who went there in place of his father. After the seventh Guru's death, the eighth Guru Har Krishan was called to Delhi, but he died there of small pox soon after his arrival. Then was the ninth Guru Tegh

Bahadur arrested under the orders of Aurangzeb and was executed at Delhi in 1675 for his sympathy with the helpless Brahmins of Kashmir whom the Emperor wished all to be brought into the fold of Islam.

Guru Gobind Singh did away with all the vestiges of Brahmanical distinctions of caste and creed and of high and low lurking in the minds of his people. He introduced a new and a novel kind of baptismal ceremony, the *Khande da Amrit*, whereby he created the *Khalsa* out of the Sikhs with the common surname of *Singh*. The novices coming together without any distinction of caste and creed were required to drink the sugared water, stirred with a double-edged sword, one after the other from one and the same vessel in a double round, the first man becoming the last in the second round.

Not only this. The Guru went a step further. After the first five—*Panj Piare*—had been baptized and the new discipline, the *Rahit* of the *Khalsa*, had been explained to them, the Guru himself begged of them that he might as well be baptized in the same form and manner. The initiation of a *Guru* by his disciples was a thing unknown in the history of religions. Guru Gobind Singh, however, wished to be baptized as one of them, adopting the same form and wearing the same symbols. And, he offered to submit himself to the same discipline as had been prescribed for the *Khalsa*. This done, he became one of the *Khalsa*, adopting the common surname of *Singh*. This strange and remarkable phenomenon has been acclaimed by a contemporary poet Bhai Gurdas II (Bahlo-ke) in his verse saying :—

ਵਹਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਿਓ ਮਰਦ ਅਗੰਮੜਾ ਵਰੀਆਮ ਇਕੋਲਾ

ਵਾਹ ਵਾਹ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਆਪੇ ਗੁਰ ਚੇਲਾ (41—47.)

And lo ! there appeared an unsurpassable man;

Wonderful, wonderful is Guru Gobind Singh, a unique hero—

a venerable preceptor as well as a humble disciple. (*Var* xil-17.)

Thus with inspiration from the Great Lord, continues he, was created the *Khalsa*, the third *Panth* — ਤੀਸਰ ਮਜ਼ਹਬ ਖਾਲਸਾ — independent of the Hindu and Muslim religions.¹

The Guru himself has explained in clearest words his views on the point of his devotion to one God, regardless of what is propounded

1. ਗੁਰ ਬਰ ਅਕਾਲ ਕੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਸੋ ਉਪਜਿਓ ਬਿਗਿਆਨਾ ।

ਤਬ ਸਹਿਜੇ ਰਚਿਓ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਸਾਬਤ ਮਰਦਾਨਾ ।...

ਇਹ ਤੀਸਰ ਮਜ਼ਹਬ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਉਪਜਿਓ ।...

ਇਉਂ ਤੀਸਰ ਪੰਥ ਰਚਾਇਨ ਵਡ ਸੂਰ ਗਹੇਲਾ ।

ਵਾਹ ਵਾਹ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਆਪੇ ਗੁਰ ਚੇਲਾ ॥ 16 ॥

by other religions. "Ever since have I devoted myself to your feet, O Lord," said he, "I recognize no one else. The Hindu and Muslim leaders and their sacred books talk of many creeds, but I believe in none of them. By Thy grace, O Lord, whatever I have said has been inspired by Thee. Leaving all others, I have come to Thee. Take me in your protection, O Lord, I am a slave of Yours." (*Ram Avtar*, 863-64.)²

To warn his people against calling him an *Avtar*, an incarnation of God, or God Himself, like the Hindus, he declared in un-equivocal language that he was but a human being like themselves. To call any human being God, according to him, was a heretic blasphemy and was against the teachings of Sikhism which inculcated that the One True God takes no birth and is Formless. "Those who call me God," said he, "shall all fall into the pit of hell. Consider me a slave of His, and have no doubt about it. I am but a slave of the Great Lord, and have come to see the spectacle of the World." (*Bachittar Natak*, *Apni Katha*, 32-33.)³

With implicit faith in the One formless Creator, Guru Gobind Singh declared the *Khalsa* to be *Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa*, the Lord's Own. With one's self and ego subdued, the credit for all his successes and victories — *fateh* — in his day-to-day battles in life belongs to Him — *Wahiguru* — the source and granter of all successes. As such, the *Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa* acclaims them to be *Wahiguru ji ki Fateh*. And ever since the creation of the *Khalsa*, the two phrases *Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa* and *Wahiguru ji ki Fateh* have become the mutual salutation of the *Khalsas*, the *Singhs*.

The creation of the *Khalsa* was, in fact, a proclamation of the independent entity of Sikhism. They were thenceforward to look to the Word of the Gurus, as incorporated in the holy *Granth Sahib*, as their only guide in their religio-social ceremonies. This freed them

2 ਪਾਇ ਗਹੇ ਜਬ ਤੇ ਤੁਮਰੇ ਤਬ ਤੇ ਕੋਊ ਆਖ ਤਰੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਆਨਯੋ ।
ਰਾਮ ਰਹੀਮ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਕੁਰਾਨ ਅਨੇਕ ਕਹੈ ਮਤ ਏਕ ਨ ਮਾਨਯੋ ।
ਸਿਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਸ਼ਾਸਤ੍ਰ ਬੇਦ ਸਬੇ ਬਹੁ ਭੇਦ ਕਹੈ ਹਮ ਏਕ ਨ ਜਾਨਯੋ ।
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਸਪਾਨਿ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਤੁਮਰੀ ਕਰਿ ਮੈ ਨ ਕਹਿਯੋ ਸਭ ਤੋਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਯੋ ॥ 863 ॥

ਦੋਹਰਾ
ਸਗਲ ਦੁਆਰ ਕਉ ਛਾਡਿ ਕੈ ਗਹਯੋ ਤੁਹਾਰੋ ਦੁਆਰ ।
ਬਾਹਿ ਗਹੇ ਕੀ ਲਾਜ ਅਸ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਦਾਸ ਤੁਹਾਰ ॥ 864 ॥

(ਰਾਮਾਵਤਾਰ)
3. ਜੋ ਹਮ ਕੋ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਉਚਰ ਹੈ । ਤੇਂ ਸਭਿ ਨਰਕਿ ਕੁੰਡ ਮਹਿ ਪਰਿ ਹੈ ।
ਮੈ ਕੋ ਦਾਸੁ ਤਵਨ ਕਾ ਜਾਨੋ । ਯਾ ਮੈਂ ਭੇਦ ਨ ਰੰਚ ਪਛਾਨੋ ॥ 32 ॥
ਮੈ ਹੋਂ ਪਰਮਪੁਰਖ ਕੋ ਦਾਸਾ । ਦੇਖਨਿ ਆਯੋ ਜਗਤ ਤਮਾਸਾ ।...

from the age-old dependence on the ancient priests and saved them from exploitation. Not only this. Drinking the baptizing *Amrit* from one and the same bowl along with other brothers-in-faith, irrespective of their old castes and creeds, and distinctions of high and low or of touchables, and untouchables, they found themselves transformed into a new people. With the hair of their heads and faces intact, and beards flowing, there was a marked change in their appearance and personality. Dressed in shorts, with swords dangling by their sides, and protective steel bangles on their wrists, they looked like soldiers. This also brought about a change in their mental outlook and they felt called upon to fight for the protection of the weak and helpless and for the suppression of tyrants. It was under this impulse that, after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, his disciple Banda Singh *Bahadur* led the Sikh volunteer force against the Mughals in the Panjab and freed most of it to the south and east of Lahore. But the Mughal empire was yet too strong for the rising power of the Sikhs. And ultimately Banda Singh was captured at Gurdas Nangal in the district of Gurdaspur and was taken to Delhi along with some eight hundred Sikhs. There they were all executed in March-June 1716. But not one of them abjured his faith to save his life. According to Khafi Khan, who was an eye-witness of this great carnage, an old widowed mother secured the order for the release of her young son. But the boy refused to be released and offered his head to the executioner saying: "I am heart and soul a devoted follower of my Guru. Despatch me quickly to my companions." On June 9, 1716, Banda Singh himself and some of his close companions were removed to the tomb of Khwaja Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiar Kaki at the Qutb Minar for execution. There he was tortured in many ways and his flesh was torn with red hot pincers. His young son was hacked to pieces and his quivering heart was thrust into Banda Singh's mouth. Finding him unmoved, calm and serene, Itmad ud-Daulah Muhammad Amin Khan, a Mughal noble, questioned him about his activities against the Mughals. In reply Banda Singh said: "Whenever men become so corrupt and wicked as to relinquish the path of equity and abandon themselves to all kinds of excesses, then the providence never fails to raise up a scourge like me to chase a race so depraved. (*Siyar-ul-Mutakhkhirin*, 403; Raymond, i, 91; Briggs, 79-80)

Emperor Bahadur Shah had issued an edict on December 10, 1710, for a general massacre of the Sikhs wherever found. But Banda Singh did not allow his struggle against the tyranny of the Mughal government to be reduced to a communal strife between the Sikhs and Muslims. It

was a matter of coincidence that Mughal rulers happened to be Muslims. Otherwise, Banda Singh was not against the Muslims as such. His was a political struggle against the tyranny of the rulers of the day. This is borne out by the fact that some five thousand Muslims of the Kalanaur and Batala areas had joined the army of Banda Singh to fight against the Mughal Government. According to the *Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Mualla* of April 28 and May 20, 1711, Banda Singh had declared that he meant no harm to the Muslims and that they were free to shout their call and recite their *khutba* and *namaz* in the Sikh army. It is also stated therein that the Sikh chief had fixed daily allowance and regular wages for them and looked after them in every way.

According to the *Miftah-ut-Tawarikh* (p. 398), the edict of Emperor Bahadur Shah was repeated by Emperor Farrukh Siyar saying that "the men of this sect wherever found may be unhesitatingly killed." Money reward was offered for the head of every Sikh dead or alive. The situation became worse during the governorship of Zakaria Khan who seemed determined to exterminate the whole nation of the Sikhs." In hundreds "they were daily brought in chains and executed in the streets of Lahore," says Syed Muhammad Latif. Driven from their homes and hearths, they had to seek shelter in jungles and deserts. The period of the governorship of Mir Muin-ul-Mulk, popularly known as Mir Mannoo (1748-53), was the worst. Even Sikh women and children were seized and taken to Lahore and imprisoned in the dark and narrow dungeons in the compound of Shahidganj, where little babes were cut to pieces and placed in the laps of their mothers. But all this failed to produce any demoralizing effect upon the Sikhs or to deter them from their resolve to free their land from the rule of tyranny. Accepting it with resignation in the Will of God, they smiled away the persecution of Mir Mannoo in a song of bravado, saying :

ਮੰਨੂੰ ਅਸਾਡੀ ਦਾਤਰੀ ਅਸੀਂ ਮੰਨੂੰ ਦੇ ਸੋਏ,
ਜਿਉਂ ਜਿਉਂ ਮੰਨੂੰ ਵਢਦਾ ਅਸੀਂ ਦੂਣ ਸਵਾਏ ਹੋਏ ।

that is :

Mannoo is our sickle,
and we are a crop for him to mow,
The more he cuts us, the more we grow.

This was literally true. The blood of Sikh martyrs helped raise a bumper crop of volunteers to join the ranks of the *Dal Khalsa* and die for the cause of *dharma*, the liberation of the motherland. The death of Mir Mannoo on November 4, 1753, by having been dragged along the

earth by his frightened horse in a Sikh-hunting expedition, gave them a sigh of relief from the Mughal side. But they had yet to face another and a stronger enemy in Ahmad Shah Durrani of Afghanistan who successfully brought the Mughal Emperor to his knees in 1757 and 1759 and defeated the Marathas at Panipat in 1761. In February 1762, he also inflicted a very heavy loss of life on the Sikhs in the second holocaust, known as *Wadda Ghalughara*. But the Sikhs were made of a different unbending metal. They knew no defeat. It only hardened them for a counter offensive. Within three months of the *Ghalughara*, while Ahmad Shah was still in the Panjab, the Sikhs rushed upon Sirhind and defeated his governor Zain Khan. On January 14, 1764, the third anniversary of the battle of Panipat, they inflicted a crushing defeat on the Afghans of Sirhind, killed its governor Zain Khan in battle and freed the entire cis-Sutlej Panjab from the Afghan possession.

Ahmad Shah was then all rage against the Sikhs, and he rushed upon the Panjab in the winter of the year, but he was sadly disappointed in his campaign. The Sikhs would not let him have a foothold in the land. Qazi Nur Muhammad of Gunjaba, who had accompanied the Shah, was greatly impressed with what he saw of the Sikhs and has, in his *Jang-Nama*, paid glowing tribute to them for their bravery and high moral character, saying :

They are courageous like lions in the field of battle....

The body of every one of them is like a piece of rock, and in physical grandeur, every one of the them is more than fifty persons...

During a battle they come jumping into the field of action, roaring like lions. ...

If their army takes to flight, do not take it as an actual flight. It is a war tactic of theirs. ...

In no case would they slay a coward, nor would they put an obstacle in the way of a fugitive.

They do not plunder the wealth and ornaments of a women, be she a well-to-do lady or a maid servant.

There is no adultery among them, nor are they given to thieving.

The ways and manners of these people received their impetus from Nanak who taught them a separate religion;

He was succeeded by Gobind Singh. From him they received the title of *Singh*.

They are not from amongst the Hindus. They have a separate religion of their own. (*Chapter xli*, pp. 156-9.)

This was the *Khalsa* of the eighteenth century who, under the impact

of the teachings of Gurus Nanak-Gobind Singh, had risen to such heights of personal valour and morality as to elicit this high praise from one of their worst enemies. Credit for this all is due to the Immortalizing draught, the *Khande da Amrit*, administered to them by the Great Guru. It not only freed them from old Hinduism but also infused a new life in them with exemplary character and undying spirit for the service of the community and country.

No sooner did Ahmad Shah Durrani leave the country towards the end of March 1765 than the Khalsa met at Amritsar on the occasion of Baisakhi on April 10 and decided by a *gurmata* to march upon Lahore which they occupied on the 16th. With the occupation of the capital of the Panjab, virtually the whole of the Panjab was freed not only from the Mughals but also from the Afghans.

In response to the joint petition of the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh citizens of Lahore, Sardar Ranjit Singh of the Sukkarchakkia *Misal* made it the capital of his territories in 1799 and laid there the foundation of the Sikh empire which became a part of the British empire in India in 1849.

II

Though the Khalsa were able to secure the political independence of the Panjab from local tyranny and foreign incursions, they could not, unfortunately, maintain the purity of their religion against the inroads of Brahminism. The reasons are not far to seek. Soon after the creation of the Khalsa in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh had not only to face the opposition of the Brahmin-ridden Hindu Rajas of the Shivalak Hills but also of the Mughal officials. This robbed him of almost all of his time required for the proper grounding of the new Khalsa converts who had come mostly from the Hindu stock. During the short period of Banda Singh Bahadur (1709-16), the Khalsa was busy in fighting against the Mughal faujdars who, in pursuance of the royal *farmans* of Emperors Bahadur Shah and Farrukh-Siyar for the indiscriminate wholesale massacre of the Sikhs, were doing their utmost to exterminate the community. This continued for some forty years when the Khalsa had to seek shelter in deserts, jungles and mountains. During their absence, their religious places like *dharamsalas* were desecrated and demolished, and their scriptural literature was burnt down. Under these circumstances, the maintenance of Sikh missionary and educational centres was impossible. The same uncertain state of affairs continued up to the end of the century when they had not unoften to face the Afghan invasions and struggle against the remnants of the old order and consolidate their political gains.

Some efforts were, of course, made during the days of the Misals and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, both in trans-Sutlej and cis-Sutlej areas, to revive the Gurdwaras and *dharmshalas* with which the educational centres, known as *pathshalas* were closely associated. In the north, commendable work was done by Udasi *Sadhus* and in the South by Nirmala saints. But as both of these orders believed in asceticism and were mostly scholars of Sanskrit and Vedantic literature, they had Brahmanical leanings. They could not feel persuaded to instruct the Sikh masses in the puritan way of life as enunciated by Guru Gobind Singh.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was, no doubt, a Sikh, but his government was not a theocracy. It was a popular government. Its important ministerial portfolios were mostly held by Muslims and Hindus. It is true that *Nihang Singhs* at times played a prominent part in religious matters. But, generally, they remained exclusive, taking no interest in public affairs, much less in the propagation of religion or in running of *pathshalas* or schools for the education of people to have any influence on their lives. On the other hand, the Brahmin adventurers from the Uttar Pradesh, and the Dogras from Jammu, assumed undue importance in the councils of the Maharaja and gathered round them people of their own persuasions. With them came in the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses and the performance of Brahmanical ceremonies which were also occasionally attended and performed by the Sikh Sardars either out of courtesy towards their friends and colleagues or for lack of knowledge of their own faith. And such social courtesy at the sacrifice of one's religious conviction is a sign of weakness. This growing weakness on the part of Sikhs in the first half of the nineteenth century was keenly felt by sincere devotees of Sikhism who feared lest it should, in course of time, reduce the religion of Gurus Nanak-Gobind Singh to a minor sect of Hinduism or result in its absorption therein beyond recognition. This meant the nullification of the work of the Gurus and of the Khalsa for over three centuries for the uplift of the people.

Considerable responsibility for this rot lay on the shoulders of the Bedi and Sodhi families to which the Gurus had originally belonged. The respect with which the common people looked upon them was not unoften expressed by their prostrating before them or by touching their feet. In their vanity, these Bedi and Sodhi elders assumed the airs of undue superiority and behaved like spiritual preceptors or *gurus* of old. At times they moved from place to place with large following, receiving offerings from their admirers and 'showering' blessings upon them. This became a sort of man-worship which had been disapproved and deprecated by the Sikh Gurus.

Sardars & Bedi's are preaching the Sikh faith as was in vogue over 700 years ago. They cultivated from their elders. They are not in decline, the present status of Sikh thought was not made difficult from Hindu.

like Yashwantrao

III

All these un-Sikh practices were eating into the vitals of the religion and called for a bold reformer to stem the tide of heresy. And, he appeared in the person of *Baba Dayal*. As a devoted *Sahajdhari* Sikh, he was a staunch believer in the independent entity of the Sikh faith, with *Guru Granth Sahib* as its only scripture. He held that all ceremonies in life should be performed with the recitation of the hymns of their holy book which inculcated the worship of the One Formless God—*Nirankar*—through constant repetition of His Name. With *Nirankar* always on his lips and asking others to do the same, he was known as *Nirankari*, and his movement for bringing back people from heresy to the path of *Nirankar* also acquired the same name.

Baba Dayal was born at Peshawar on May 17, 1783 (Baisakh Sudi 15, Puranmasi, 1840 BK.). His ancestors originally belonged to Kabul in Afghanistan and had shifted to Peshawar. Here his father Ram Sahai Malhotra ran a banking shop dealing with the exchange of Afghan currency. His mother Ladikki was a pious lady. She regularly attended the morning service at the Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh and was accompanied by her son. This greatly influenced the life of young Dayal. With the deaths of his parents in quick succession, Dayal was persuaded by his maternal uncle Milkha Singh to move to Rawalpindi in 1808. Here he started a grocer's shop. He soon attracted the attention of the local Sikhs with his honest and truthful dealings and regular attendance at the Bara-dari Gurdwara, known as *Peshawarian di dharmsala*.

In March 1809 his business once took him to the town of Bhera which was then a great market. Here he stayed at the Dharamsala of *Sant Budhu Shah* of the Sewa-Panthi order and developed close relationship with him through his discourses and identical views on Sikhism. Bhai Charan Das Kapur and his wife Bishan Devi, who generally attended the dharmasala, were highly impressed by the religious devotion and personality of Bhai Dayal and offered the hand of their daughter Mool Devi in marriage to him. This was the month of Chettra which is considered inauspicious for marriages by Brahmins who would not agree to perform the marriage ceremony during the *Nahs* or ill-omened days. But Bhai Dayal had no belief in the sinister aspect of the stars and looked upon it as a superstition deprecated by Sikhism. *Sant Budhu Shah* endorsed his views and, with his persuasion, Charan Das and his wife agreed to the performance of their daughter's marriage in the local gurdwara in the month of Chettra itself with the recitations of *Anand* and

other hymns from the *Guru Granth Sahib*, followed by the Sikh prayer, the *Ardas* of the *Khalsa*. This marriage is very significant in history for its simplicity, freedom from Brahmanical rites and devotion to the Word of the Gurus. It also added to the reputation of *Bhai Dayal* as a practical reformer. Example is always better than precept and is a living proof of the preceptor's sincerity.

On one occasion during his visit to Rawalpindi, Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent, through an orderly of his, a *Mohar* for *Prasad* at the dharamsala of *Bhai Ram Singh* where *Baba Dayal* used to discourse upon the hymns of *Guru Granth Sahib*. The *Baba* sent back a message saying that it would be more in the fitness of things for the Maharaja to attend the congregation at the gurdwara and to make the offering personally. The Maharaja readily accepted the suggestion and was present at the Gurdwara next morning. He also proposed to grant a *jagir* to *Baba Dayal* who, however, declined to accept it. The Maharaja then granted it in the name of the Gurdwara.

The radical reforms preached by *Baba Dayal* were not relished by the priestly class of the Brahmins, most of whose income came from the offering of the people whose ceremonies were guided and presided over by them. Some of the reactionary Sikhs were also opposed to his views under similar influences. The leaders of this opposition were *Sardar Nihal Singh Chhachhi* and a Hindu named *Tauroo Rai*. In the course of a discussion, they told him that while he washed the feet of the humblest of Sikhs, he preached against the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses. This, they said, was a sort of blasphemy and they imposed upon him a fine on behalf of the Hindu society. True to his conviction, *Baba Dayal* replied that as a Sikh, he was doing what the great Gurus had preached and was not liable to pay any fine or to be coerced by ostracism. This not only resulted in his personal boycott, and of his Nirankari associates, but also in closing to him the doors of *Peshawarian di dharamsala*. But nothing could deflect him from the path that he had chosen for himself. He believed his cause to be right and sacred. Opposition to it rather added to his moral strength. He purchased a piece of land on December 3, 1851, on the bank of the Layee stream, to the southwest of the city and set up a gurdwara there, known as Nirankari Darbar. With this the Nirankari movement gained a permanent footing. The followers and admirers of *Baba Dayal* began their work of reform with greater zeal. The manuscript volume of the sacred *Guru Granth Sahib* of 1748 (1805 Bk.) was also brought from *Peshawarian di dharamsala*, and, in spite of the opposition of *Nihal Singh* and *Tauroo Rai*,

the reform-minded Sikhs gathered at the new Nirankari gurdwara in increasing numbers.

One Bhai Diwan Singh of Mangowal, popular for his religious discourses, visited Rawalpindi with a number of his followers and put up in the Bara-dari Gurdwara. He was invited to dinner by two Narankari brothers. One of them happened to die during the night before the fixed day. Bhai Diwan Singh, therefore, refused to come for the dinner saying that it had become polluted and that it would remain so for 13 days for ordinary people and for 21 days for saints like himself. This was nothing but a superstition. When *Baba Dayal* heard of it, he desired that the food prepared for the occasion might be brought to the Nirankari *Sangat* and it was served there after the cremation, unmindful of the murmurings of some people. He also availed himself of the earliest opportunity to address a large gathering in the Bara-dari gurdwara in the presence of Bhai Diwan Singh and, refering to the incidence, he quoted from the *Guru Granth Sahib* the hymns of the Gurus saying that births and deaths were all in the Will of God and that there was no pollution for those who believed in Him.

During the visit of *Baba Dayal* to Kala Gujran in the district of Jhelum, a *Sadhu*, Beli Ram by name, was greatly upset by his unitarian preachings and, with the help of his follower Asa Ram, administered to Bhai Dayal a poisonous pill instead of a tonic. Fortunately it had no adverse effect on him. Seeing him hale and hearty after some days, the *Sadhu* was greatly surprised. And, when Bhai Dayal asked him for another pill saying that the previous one had done him good, *Sadhu* Beli Ram and his follower not only acknowledged their crime and asked for his forgiveness but also abandoned their ascetic way of life and came to the Sikh faith.

Baba Dayal had three sons, Darbara Singh born on Wednesday Baisakh 1, 1871 Bk. (April 11/12, 1814), Bhag Mall, born in 1877 Bk. (A D. 1820), and Ratan Chand born on Thursday, Chaitra Sudi 1, 1887 Bk. (March 25, 1830). All of them were devoted Sikhs, dedicated to the Nirankari mission of their father.

The performance of some of the Brahmanical rites on the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Lahore on June 27, 1839, and of the *satī* or burning alive of four of his queens and seven maid-servants on his funeral pyre under the baneful influence of the Brahmins and the Dogras sent out a thrill of horror throughout the country. The same horrid spectacle was seen in November 1840 when his son Maharaja Kharak Singh and grandson Kunwar Nau-Nihal Singh died. The custom of *satī* was not

only cruel and inhuman in nature but was also un-Sikh. Bhai Dayal, therefore, raised a strong voice against it in his congregations and warned the Sikhs against following it.

Baba Dayal passed away at Rawalpindi at the age of 72 on Tuesday, Magh 18, 1911 BK., January 30, 1855. The opponents of Nirankari movement reported to the local officials that he had been socially boycotted by the people of the city and if his body were taken to the common crematorium, there might be some disturbance of peace. To avoid this, a prohibitory order was issued by the Deputy Commissioner. This came as a great surprise to the Nirankaris. But Bhai Darbara Singh, the eldest son of Baba Dayal, had already decided to entrust the dead body to the running waters of the Layee rivulet. This place, later on, came to be known as Dayal Sar.

A day before his death, *Baba Dayal* had nominated Bhai Darbara Singh as the future leader of the Nirankari mission. He was as enthusiastic about social reform in Sikh society as his father and he earnestly took the work in hand, particularly in respect of marriage ceremonies. Therein the Brahmanical influence was then being felt the most.

Within six weeks of his taking over the pontificate of the Nirankaris, *Baba Darbara Singh* called a conference of the members and admirers of the order on Chet 1, 1911 Bk., March 13, 1855. There he explained the teachings of the great Gurus and the Sikh way of life. He deplored at the same time that some un-Sikh practices had, with the passage of time, crept into the Sikh society under the influence of their neighbours dominated by the Brahmanical priests. He made a particular reference to the marriage ceremony where, at the fire worship *havan*, the priest recited some verses in Sanskrit which nobody in the assemblage understood. Even the priest himself, at times, did not understand them. He only repeated what he had learnt up by heart. Moreover, Sikhism did not allow fire-worship or worship of any gods and goddesses, he said. Thus the whole ceremony became a meaningless formality.

For a practical demonstration of the Sikh marriage ceremony, *Baba Darbara Singh* called out for a girl and a boy. One Hari Singh Adhwalia stood up with his daughter Nihali, and then Nihal Singh with his son Bhola Singh. On the following morning, the couple was married in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* with the recitation of sacred hymns and *Ānand* therefrom, and as an expression of devotion to the Word of the great Masters, the couple walked round the holy scripture four times to the accompaniment of the four hymns of *lāwān* and then bowed down to it in submission to its teachings. *Baba Darbara Singh* then explained

to the couple, in a common speech to all assembled on the occasion, their duties and responsibilities towards each other, and to the society at large. This simple ceremony of marriage sanctified by the teachings of the Gurus is known as *Gurmat Viyāh* or *Anand Viyāh*.

(The whole procedure prescribed for and followed in the *Anand* marriage ceremony is described in detail in the literature issued on the subject by the Nirankari Darbar, the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.)

Baba Darbara Singh then undertook an extensive tour of the surrounding towns and villages in Pothohar to preach his mission and guided the performance of a number of marriages there according to the *Gurmat*.

Hearing of the fame of the Nirankari movement, Bhai Ram Singh Nāmdhāri of Bhaini visited Baba Darbara Singh in the summer of A.D. 1856. The latter explained to him the various Sikh ceremonies as they should be performed in accordance with the teachings of the Gurus. The Namdhari leader, however, adopted only a part of the *Gurmat Viyāh* ceremony inasmuch as performing it with the recitation of the *lāwān* and *Anand*. He retained the Brahmanical *Vedi*, the fire worship *Havan*, etc., perhaps as a compromise with the old Hindu system whose influence was too deep in his part of the country to be easily eradicated.

In 1861, Baba Darbara Singh paid a visit to Amritsar. Here he wished to perform the marriage of a couple, Mira Devi of Kala Gujran, district Jhelum, and Boota Singh, in front of the Akal Takht in the precincts of the Golden Temple. They had come all the way from their homes as desired by Baba Darbara Singh. The *Jathedār* of the Akal Takht and the Head *Granthi* of the Darbar Sahib did not permit him to do so. This was then the state of affairs in the holiest of the holy Sikh shrines. So predominant was the influence of the Brahmanicals there that he had to find another place in the city in the *dharmsala* of Mahant Dayal Singh to perform the marriage according to the *Gurmat*.

It was in these days that Bhai Jassa Singh, a *Granthi* of the Darbar Sahib, died on his bedstead. This was considered to be inauspicious by the old Brahmin-ridden people saying that Jassa Singh had died *be-gatā*, as unacceptable for honorable transmigration of his soul. According to them, he should have been laid on the ground with his head towards the north. This was being talked about throughout the city of Amritsar. On hearing of it, Baba Darbara Singh went to the Akal Takht. Baba Bikram Singh Bedi then happened to be sitting there. Baba Darbara Singh said that Bhai Jassa Singh was a devoted Sikh who regularly bathed in the tank or *Sarovar* of the Darbar Sahib, read the holy scripture daily and

never failed in his morning and evening prayers. Such a pious person could certainly not be said to have died an evil death. Babā Bikram Singh then said : "What you say is right, but we are worldly people and have to live and die among them." Baba Darabara Singh did not relish this compromising attitude of Baba Bikram Singh Bedi and unhesitatingly said : "You claim to be the leader of the Sikhs; these words of yours would mislead these unsuspecting ignorant people." He then quoted the following lines of Guru Nanak :

ਜਾਲਉ ਐਸੀ ਰੀਤਿ ਜਿਤੁ ਮੈ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਵਿਸਰੈ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਈ ਭਲੀ ਪਰੀਤਿ ਜਿਤੁ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸੇਤੀ ਪਤਿ ਰਹੈ ॥

Follow not the custom that maketh thee forsake the Lord,
Blessed is the love, sayeth Nanak, that maintaineth thy honour with
the Lord. (Vadhans Vār, I, p. 590.)

Baba Darbara Singh greatly strengthened the Nirankari movement by his persuasive eloquence and through a number of missionary centres known as *Beera*. Before his death on Phagan 3, 1926 Bk. (February 13, 1870), he nominated his youngest brother Ratan Chand, popularly known as Ratta, to continue the work after him.

The new pontiff was a devoted Sikh and an enthusiastic propagator of the Nirankari reforms. He spent the greater part of the first three years of his leadership in intensive study of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and other allied literature. The death of Baba Darbara Singh had provided the Brahmanical Hindus and the luke-warm Sikhs patronized by Baba Bikram Singh Bedi to intensify their opposition to the Nirankari movement. Under their pressure some of the Nirankari missionaries or *Beeredars* had become lax in their duties and failed to regularly read, as desired by Baba Darbara Singh, the instructions or *hukamnamas* issued from the Nirankari headquarters. When this was brought to the notice of Baba Ratta, he reprimanded the negligent missionaries, in his *hukam-nama* of April 11, 1873 (Baisakh 1, 1930 Bk.), for their compromising attitude towards the old Brahmanical rites and rituals in contradiction of the Nirankari reforms of which they were expected to be enthusiastic propagators.

Baba Ratta also encouraged the establishment of some fifty gurdwaras in the Dhanni and Pothohar areas and introduced therein the holding of annual conferences on fixed dates for the propagation of Sikhism as a separate independent religion in the light of the teachings of Gurus Nanak and Gobind Singh. In these gurdwaras there was a regular reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in addition to the recitation of the *Sukhmani* and other hymns in the morning, and the service came to an end with

ardas. On every alternative Sunday, it was imperative for the leader of the local congregation, the *beeredar*, to read there the Nirankari rules of conduct to keep the *Sangat* reminded of their duties and responsibilities. The evening service in the gurdwara consisted of the recitation of the *Rahiras* and *Sohila* in addition to *kirtan* or the singing of hymns from the scripture.

He was opposed to the installation of Brahmanical idols of gods and goddesses in the Sikh gurdwaras as it was against the monotheistic teachings of the Gurus. Seeing such idols installed in the Panchayati gurdwara at Kirpa, Baba Ratta walked out of it along with the accompanying *Sangat* on the occasion of the death rites of Bhai Ram Singh, father of Roop Singh Nirankari. Later on Bhai Roop Singh and his brothers erected a new gurdwara at Kirpa where an annual mela was held on Phagan 8 and 9.

While the Nirankari leaders were successfully preaching the Sikh faith in the west and north-west of the Panjab, Baba Ram Singh Namdhari of Bhaini, with the inspiration received from Bhai Balak Singh of Hazro, brought back thousands of luke warm people to Sikhism in the eastern and south eastern parts of the country. Like the Nirankari movement, his was also a purely religious movement aiming at the revival of the Sikh faith which, he felt, was fast declining not only among the masses but also among the custodians and managers of Sikh shrines. With the zeal of new converts, thousands of people gathered round him and attended his congregations at Bhaini and at the fairs and religious centres visited by him. Nothing objectionable, much less political, was to be found in his speeches, but as his movement, known as the Kooka or Namdhari, came to prominence soon after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, some of the British officers felt nervous over the behaviour of some of the Kookas who, in a state of frenzy, at times, took the law into their own hands, demolished and desecrated Hindu and Muslim places of worship and led murderous attacks on butchers. The attacks on cow-killing butchers was at worst a social crime born of mis-directed zeal for the protection of cows under the age-old Brahmanical prejudices. There was nothing rebellious in them. Moreover, Baba Ram Singh was absolutely innocent in the attack on Malerkotla butchers. He had neither sanctioned nor approved of the attack. He had, in fact, protested against it and had refused to accompany the attackers. And when he found that a group of Kookas had gone out of his hands, he, in all earnestness, sent a message to the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police at Ludhiana, requesting the *Sarkar* to make their own arrangements to maintain law and order. To hold

such a noble and innocent soul responsible for the unlawful activities of some of his followers and to exile him away for life was the height of injustice and tyranny. The Government of India, however, soon discovered that the Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana and the Commissioner of Ambala division had mishandled the Kooka situation, had exceeded their powers and had un-justifiably blown away as many as sixty-five Kookas from the guns on January 17-18, 1872. Both of them were removed from service and were suitably punished.

The Government of the Panjab, however, kept the Kooka headquarters at Bhaini under strict surveillance and established a police post there. It was removed in 1922.

It is a great pity that the Namdhari movement which, under the fostering care of its great founders, Baba Balak Singh and Baba Ram Singh, aimed at restoring the Sikh faith to its original purity, has not been able to completely shake off the Brahmanical practices and rituals like untouchability, *Vedi*, *havan*, etc. Individually, some of the Namdharis are great devotees, given to meditation and recitation of the sacred Name of the Lord. Unlike the Nirankaris, the Namdharis have developed into a sect, claiming for their leaders heritage direct from Guru Gobind Singh, the last Guru of the Sikhs, who died at Nander in the Deccan in October 1708.

With the exile of Baba Ram Singh Namdhari from the Panjab and hostile attitude of the Government towards his followers, their work in the field of religion came to a standstill. The reform-minded Sikh leaders of Amritsar, therefore, organized the Singh Sabha movement, with Sardar Thaker Singh Sandhanwalia as its president and *Giani* Gian Singh as its secretary, in 1873, two years before the establishment of the Arya Samaj at Bombay in 1875. The Singh Sabha of Amritsar, the Khalsa Diwan of Lahore and the Chief Khalsa Diwan at Amritsar, with its Sikh Educational Committee, have rendered commendable service to the Sikh community throughout the country, particularly in the field of education. The Khalsa schools and colleges established under their lead and inspiration became, in a way, centres of Sikh missionary work and they had the fullest sympathy and co-operation of the leaders and followers of the Nirankari movement.

The Singh Sabha leaders encouraged the recruitment of the Sikhs in the Indian Army and, with the increase in their numbers, prevailed upon the Government to have separate Sikh regiments, with gurdwaras therein managed by Sikh *granthis* and supervised by senior Sikh officers. The Sikh soldiers were all expected to be regular in their attendance at

the gurdwara where the *Granthi* regularly instructed them in the Sikh way of life and recited and explained to them the hymns of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the *rahit* of the Khalsa as enunciated by Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh regimental gurdwaras thus indirectly became the centres of *Sikhi parchar*, and as these soldiers were free from non-Sikh influences, they became *pacca* in the observance of Sikh *rahit* and exercised a very healthy influence on their families and relatives whenever they came home either on leave or on retirement. Not only this. Their manly bearing and imposing personalities inspired other youngmen from amongst the Brahmins, Mahajans, Krars, etc., to join the ranks of the Khalsa to be able to enter into military service as Sikhs or to otherwise look like *Sardars*.

Some of the leading missionaries of the Singh Sabha like Bhai Dit Singh and Giani Thakar Singh were closely associated with the Nirankari leaders. The former is said to have spent some six months at Rawalpindi and felt inspired by the ceremonies performed at the Nirankari Darbar according to *Gurmat*.

Maharaja Hira Singh of Nabha felt deeply interested in the reforms introduced by the Nirankaris and visited Rawalpindi some time in the first decade of the century to have first-hand knowledge of the work being done by them for the revival of Sikhism in its original glory. He met Baba Ratta and his prominent associates and was greatly impressed by their sincerity and zeal. He asked them if he could be of any service to them. Baba Ratta explained that the biggest handicap in the way of the Sikh masses to accept the reforms, particularly in marriage ceremony, was the non-recognition of the *Anand* marriage by the law of the land, which had been framed on the basis of the age-old Hindu practice. It was freely broadcast by the anti-reform Brahmanicals, and was feared in Sikh circles, that, in case of an *Anand* marriage being challenged in a court of law, it might not be declared null and void, adversely affecting the right of inheritance. The Maharaja realized the genuineness of the fear, and on his return to Nabha asked his son Tikka Ripudaman Singh, who was then a member of the Viceroy's Council, to have the needful done. Tikka Sahib presented a bill in the Council to accord legal recognition to the *Anand* marriage among the Sikhs. It was later pushed forward by Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia with whose efforts it was passed as the Anand Marriage Act (VII of 1909) on October 22, 1909.

To avoid any complication Baba Ratta nominated his son Baba Gurdit Singh, as his successor on October 29, 1907 (Katik 13, 1964 Bk.) and at the same time declared that he would in turn be followed by his son Hara Singh.

Baba Gurdit Singh occasionally attended the annual conferences and *melas* of the Nirankaris in Pothohar, but mostly Baba Hara Singh represented him there and encouraged the *Sahajdhari* Nirankaris to grow hair and become regular *Singhs*. During his visit to Kirpa in 1910, on the occasion of Phagan 8 *mela*, it was brought to his notice at the time of the *langar* that his hosts Mulraj, Hari Chand and Pala Ram sold the forbidden tobacco at their shops. Pala Ram said that they did not smoke tobacco, but only sold it at their shop and had to touch it. Moreover, he was under the impression that the restriction against touching it applied only to the *Amritdhari Singhs* and not to the *Sahajdhari* Sikhs. Baba Hara Singh disagreed with Pala Ram. To him, it was an obnoxious weed equally forbidden for both the *Amritdharis* and the *Sahajdharis*. After a couple of minutes' pause, he asked a Sikh to bring three combs from his trunk and gave it to them. He then asked the three brothers to tie up their hair like the *Singhs* and in future to observe the *rahit* of the *Amritdhari Singhs* after formal baptism. This inspired almost all the *Sahajdhari* Nirankaris to be formally baptized as the *Khalsa*.

By the end of the second decade of the century, demand for reform in the gurdwaras reached its highest peak. The cold-blooded massacre of some 130 Sikhs at Nankana Sahib on February 20, 1921, by *Mahant* Narain Das shocked the community, in fact the whole of the country, and called for immediate taking over of the control of the gurdwaras by the Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, organized for the purpose on November 15-16, 1920. The Nirankaris were in full sympathy with the aims and objects of the Committee, and their leader Baba Gurdit Singh was elected as a member of its Working Committee.

On Phagan 4, 1978 BK. (February 15, 1922), was laid the foundation of the new building of the Nirankari Darbar at Rawalpindi. It was completed in December 1922 and was the highest building in the city.

During the 1946-1947 disturbances in Rawalpindi and the neighbouring areas, Baba Hara Singh rendered commendable service to the Hindus and Sikhs. When the disturbances began on March 5, 1947, Baba Hara Singh was at Gakkhar in the Fatehjang tehsil. The dislocated people gathered in the gurdwara and were brought safely to Rawalpindi via Fatehjang where they had to stay for three days. The Nirankari Darbar, the Shri Guru Singh Sabha gurdwara and the adjoining buildings were the main rendezvous of the helpless refugees during those perilous days.

Baba Gurdit Singh died at Rawalpindi on April 26, 1947 (Baisakh 14, 2004 BK.). The city was then under curfew and it appeared difficult to convey the dead body for cremation to Dayalsar outside the city. The

Deputy Commissioner, however, was greatly helpful in providing a strong police-guard for the funeral procession, and the cremation was performed at Dayalsar with all solemnity.

With the creation of Pakistan in August 1947 on religious basis, the Panjab was divided into two parts, with the result that the Hindu and Sikh population of the western Panjab was driven out into India, and most of the Nirankaris settled down in Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala, etc., etc. Some of them moved on to other parts of the country.

Baba Hara Singh, the successor of Baba Gurdit Singh, soon got in touch with the Nirankaris scattered all over the country and held a conference of theirs in January 1948. This was the first of their annual conferences after the partition. Their annual and other periodical gatherings provide an excellent platform for the propagation of Sikhism. In recent years the Nirankaris have established their headquarters at Chandigarh, the foundation stone of which was laid by His Highness Maharaja Yadavindra Singh of Patiala on February 2, 1960 (Magh 20, 2016 BK.).

Baba Hara Singh died at Amritsar on January 15, 1971, and was cremated at Chandigarh on the premises of the Nirankari Darbar. He was succeeded by Baba Gurbakhsh Singh, the present head of the Nirankaris. Like his predecessors, he is a devoted Sikh, with full faith in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and is a strong advocate of the reforms introduced by his predecessors.

The Nirankaris, as mentioned earlier, are pure monotheists believing in the unity of God who, as stated in the opening lines of the Sikh Scripture, is the Creator of the Universe, Self-existent and Formless. They do not believe in any gods and goddesses and have full faith in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which is their only scripture to be relied upon for guidance in life and for the performance of ceremonies from birth to death. They recognize no distinctions of caste and creed and of high or low, and observe no untouchability like the Hindus. They perform no *Shrādhā* or feeding of priestly Brahmins for the benefit of their dead ancestors or relatives, nor do they recognize good and bad omens, or favourable or evil effects of stars on human lives and behaviour.

They perform their marriages according to the *Gurmāt* in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and they are opposed to the exhibition of dowry. They do not consult Brahmins or astrologers for auspicious time for marriages, business, travelling, etc. Widow marriage is allowed but polygamy is prohibited. Instead of weeping and mourning on the occasion of a death, they take it as a natural occurrence in the Will of God and sing

hymns from the holy scripture. Besides the usual Sikh places of historical and religious importance, Nirankaris look upon Dayalsar Gurdwara at Rawalpindi with special reverence. They generally greet one another with the words '*Dhan Nirankar*' and their *Ardas* begins with the words '*Adi sat Nirankar da dhian dhar ke Guru Nanak lei dhyae*'. ... The Nirankari pontiffs are pure vegetarians. They eat no flesh and opium, nor do they drink any intoxicants like *bhanga*, wine, etc. Smoking is strictly prohibited among the Nirankaris. Generally speaking, they are honest and reliable businessmen, looking upon cheating and using false weights as peculiarly heinous crimes. They believe in living upon what they earn by the sweat of their brow and devote the offerings made to the *Guru Granth Sahib* on ceremonial and other occasions to religious and charitable purposes.

Note

THE PSEUDO—NIRANKARIS

Of late a schismatic group has grown out of the Nirankaris and is known as Sant Nirankari Mandal. It was organized by one *Bhai Buta Singh*, a *Ragi*, who could not adhere to the puritanic discipline of the original Nirankari Mission, and a friend of his *Bhai Avtar Singh*. *Bhai Buta Singh* died in 1943 at Murree. After the partition of India, *Avtar Singh* moved to Delhi in 1947, where, after his death, he was succeeded by his son, *Gurbachan Singh*, the present leader of the Mandal.

APPENDIX

The Anand Marriage Act (VII of 1909), 22 October, 1909

An act to remove doubts as to the validity of the marriage ceremony common among the Sikhs called *Anand*.

Whereas it is expedient to remove any doubts as to the validity of the marriage ceremony common among the Sikhs called *Anand*, it is hereby enacted as follows :

Short Title and Extent

(1) This act may be called Anand Marriage Act 1909 and it extends to the whole of British India.

Validity of Anand Marriage

(2) All marriages which may be or may have been duly solemnized according to the Sikhs' marriage ceremony called *Anand* shall be and shall be deemed to have been effected from the date of the solemnized of each respectively, good and valid in law.

Exemption of Certain marriages from Act

(3) Nothing in this Act shall be applied to :

- (a) Any marriage between persons not professing the Sikh Religion;
- (b) Any marriage which has been judicially declared null and void.

Saving of Marriages Solemnized according to other ceremonies

(4) Nothing in this act shall effect the validity of any marriage duly solemnized according to any other marriage ceremony customary among the Sikhs.

Non-validation of marriage without the prohibited degrees

(5) Nothing in this Act shall be deemed to validate any marriage between persons who are related to each other in any degree of consanguinity or affinity which would, according to the customary law of the Sikhs, render a marriage between them illegal.

CHRONOLOGY

Sikh Gurus

1. Guru Nanak	1469—1539
2. Guru Angad	1539—1552
3. Guru Amar Das	1552—1574
4. Guru Ram Das	1574—1581
5. Guru Arjan	1581—1606
6. Guru Hargobind	1606—1645
7. Guru Har Rai	1645—1661
8. Guru Har Krishan	1661—1664
9. Guru Tegh Bahadur	1664—1675
10. Guru Gobind Singh	1675—1708

Nirankari Leaders

1. Baba Dayal (born 1783)	1783—1855
2. Baba Darbara Singh (born April 1814)	1855—1870
3. Baba Sahib Ratta (Rattan Chand) (born 1830)	1870—1909
4. Baba Gurdit Singh (born 1868)	1909—1947
5. Baba Hara Singh	1947—1971
6. Baba Gurbakhsh Singh	1971—

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ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ ਲਿਟਰੇਚਰ

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|----|--|---|
| 1. | ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਮੋਢੀ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਬਾਬਾ ਦਇਆਲ ਜੀ
ਲੇਖਕ : ਗਿਆਨੀ ਹੀਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ 'ਦਰਦ' | 2-00 |
| 2. | ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਅਰਦਾਸ — ਭਗਉਤੀ ਕਿ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ
ਅਰਦਾਸ ਦੇ ਮੰਗਲ ਬਾਰੇ ਵਿਸ਼ੇਸ਼ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ | 2-00 |
| 3. | ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ ਚੱਲਣ ਦਾ ਚਿੱਠਾ — ਨਵੀਂ ਛਾਪ | 2-00 |
| 4. | ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਵਿਆਹ — ਸ਼ਬਦਾਂ ਦੇ ਅਰਥ
ਡਾਕਟਰ ਭਾਈ ਜੋਧ ਸਿੰਘ | 2-00 |
| 5. | ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਾਰੰਭਤਾ | (Detailed History of The
Nirankari Movement) 12-00 |
| | | ਜਿਲਦ ਵਾਲੀ 15-00 |
| 6. | Gurmat Prarambhita
Appendix with Census Reports | 2-00 |
| 7. | The Nirankari Sikhs
Dr. John C.B. Webster (Macmillan Co.)
Detail Information, Mission & Census Reports
1853-1891, including ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ ਚੱਲਣ ਦਾ ਚਿੱਠਾ translation
in English by Prof. Harbans Singh, Pbi. University, Patiala | 15-00 |
| 8. | Short History of the Nirankari Movement
Prof. Sher Singh Sher | 2-00 |

Young Men's Nirankari Association

SRI NIRANKARI DARBAR
Sector 21-B, Chandigarh-160 022